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P A P E R S   O N   P L A Y - M A K I N G

# III

## The Law of the Drama

BY

FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES



Printed for the

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## INTRODUCTION

Has Brunetière in this fruitful and suggestive essay really discovered the universal law of the theatre,—or rather the universal law of the drama?

[It is convenient that in English we use the word *drama* to signify the entire art of dramatic writing, while in French the word *théâtre* has to be used to signify the art of the written drama. The drama and the theatre are so often antagonistic to each other; they so often differ, if not in their body and essence, yet in their interests and aims, that we should always be careful to distinguish between them. Much of our confusion of thought in matters dramatic and theatrical arises from our constant habit of using the words *drama* and *theater* as if they were always interchangeable terms. And tho for the purposes of the present paper they might be so used without much risk of confusion, yet I will lose no chance of noting that there is often a wide distinction between *theatrical* and *dramatic*, between

the *theater* and the *drama*. So much so that I have often said that the greatest enemy of the English drama is the English theater.]

Has then Brunetière, in this remarkable essay, discovered and expounded the veritable and universal law of drama?

Those who are concerned to know should first carefully read the essay itself. They should then study Professor Brander Matthews's comments and illustrations in the first chapter of his volume the 'Development of the Drama' and also the chapter on the 'Law of the Drama,' in his later book 'A Study of the Drama.' With these things fresh in their minds they should turn to the chapter 'Dramatic and Undramatic' in Mr. William Archer's finely analytical and comprehensive book on 'Playmaking'—a useful manual for young playwrights, full of valuable hints.

By the time the inquirer has studied all these things he will have both sides of the question before him. His decision in favor of Brunetière's theory, or against it, will probably be taken according as he has the more lately read Professor Brander Matthews or Mr. William Archer. Or, seeing that our opinions on most subjects are gen-

erally molded by our instinctive sympathies rather than by facts and arguments, the inquirer may decide the one way or the other according as he implicitly accepts the doctrine of free will with Professor Brander Matthews, or ranges himself as a determinist with Mr. William Archer.

For myself, I am a rigid, inflexible determinist. No other theory of the universe is credible, or will bear examination. I firmly believe it—in theory. But in practice I find myself lapsing and backsliding all the day long into the unrestrained indulgence of my free will. Therefore my lurking sympathies are with Brunetière; and I think that, with a little coaxing and enlargement, such as indeed he asks from his readers—with this little adjustment and explanation, I think Brunetière's law will be found to be valid and operative, if not universal, thruout the drama.

But Mr. William Archer is not only, like myself, a convinced, inflexible determinist, I am persuaded that he is also, unlike myself, a consistent one. I am sure he takes care that his practice agrees with his opinions—even when they are wrong. And in the



present matter Mr. William Archer makes out a good case against Brunetière. He presents it in his usual clear and logical way, and fortifies it with ample and varied illustrations. (See 'Playmaking' p.p. 23-33.)

Let us first challenge Mr. Archer's arguments and illustrations, and then let us see whether they cannot be agreeably "reconciled" with Brunetière's law. When a playwright finds eminent dramatic critics disagreeing, it becomes his business to "reconcile" them. Besides I love "reconciling", the favorite sport of theologians. Of course, one cannot get the same amount of genuine fun from "reconciling" doubts and difficulties in the drama that one gets from "reconciling" doubts and difficulties in theology. One ought not to expect it. Dramatic professors may not permit themselves those playful little dodges with words and facts which make theological "reconciling" such an amusing game. The Drama is a serious art, especially when serious persons like Mr. William Archer and myself get to work upon it. If then our present exercise affords us some small balance of mental profit we must be

content to leave the mere gaieties and frivolities of "reconciling" to theologians.

Brunetière's law as translated by Mr. William Archer runs as follows: "Drama is a representation of the will of man in conflict with the mysterious powers or natural forces which limit and belittle us; it is one of us thrown living upon the stage there to struggle against fatality; against social law; against one of his fellow mortals; against himself if need be; against the ambitions, the interests, the prejudices, the folly, the malevolence of those around him."

It will be seen from this that, according to Brunetière, the protagonist has a pretty wide choice of persons and things to pit himself against; and he must be a very unreasonable, or a very unfortunate man, if he cannot manage to pick a good round quarrel with one or the other of them.

Again, Mr. Archer translates—"The theater in general is nothing but the place for the development of the human will, attacking the obstacles opposed to it by destiny, fortune, or circumstances."

In this definition of his law, Brunetière abandons the idea of a personal struggle or

duel, and widens his formula until it practically includes everyman in the everyday struggle of everyday life. Indeed, taking this definition we may use an American colloquialism and sum up Brunetière's law as follows:—"The theater is nothing but the place where a man finds himself 'up against' something, and attacks it."

Now the first of the plays which Mr. Archer brings forward to refute Brunetière is the 'Agamemnon.' Well, who can deny that Agamemnon on his first entrance was "up against" something? Indeed he was "up against" what Americans would, I fear, irreverently, and a little loosely call "a tough proposition."

I gathered that much, even in Browning's translation. And it became clearer still to me in Bohn's prose version, which I was obliged to get to translate Browning. Further, in the opening scene there is a sense of past struggle, a backward glance and suggestion of possible scenes of temptation and resistance between Clytemnestra and Ægisthus. It is true that the Greek drama did not permit the introduction of these into the action of the play. But such scenes are lat-



ent in our minds; and if Shakspeare had written an 'Agememnon', they would probably have been set in the forefront of the action in great "acting" scenes akin to those in the second and third acts of 'Macbeth.'

'Œdipus' is the next play that Mr. Archer quotes to refute Brunetière. But if Agememnon was "up against" a "tough proposition," what shall we say of Œdipus? Not all the giant powers that preside at the mint of the modern American vocabulary, not all the smelting houses of modern American idiom, with all their furnaces in full blast, could coin a sufficient phrase to express the concatenation of adverse circumstances that Œdipus finds himself "up against." Surely no man since the world began has ever been "up against" a "tougher proposition" than Œdipus—except Mr. William Archer and myself, who for thirty years have been "up against" the task of reforming the English drama.

It is true that Œdipus does not "attack" the obstacles opposed to him by "destiny, fortune or circumstances." In this respect he differs from Mr. William Archer and myself. But it is difficult to see how Œdipus



could have acted otherwise than he did. He was not aware that Aristotle was going to select him as the type of tragic hero; or that Brunetière was going to discover the law of drama towards the end of the nineteenth century; or that Mr. William Archer was going to dispute Brunetière's law. Even if, Œdipus had, with the aid of Tiresias, been able to foresee all these things, he had so much family and national business on his hands at the moment that it would have been impossible for him so to guide his conduct as to "reconcile" all these eminent critics. He would still have been obliged to leave that job to me.

As the matter stands it must be allowed that Œdipus by remaining passive under his misfortunes, has rather given Brunetière away. It is true that in 'Œdipus', as in the 'Agamemnon,' there is some latent sense of struggle, and again we may be quite sure that if Shakspeare with his larger form of drama had written an 'Œdipus,' we should have had scenes of direct personal conflict; that these scenes would have been set in the forefront of the action; and that he would consequently have written what to a modern

audience would have been a more vivid, more absorbing, more exciting play—a better acting play.

It remains to be noted that the performances of Greek tragic drama at the time of *Æschylus* had something in them of the nature of a religious festival. Doubtless this religious feeling, which was of course widely different from our modern religious feeling, declined to some extent in the days of *Sophocles* and *Euripides*. This is apparent in the later dramatists' treatment of their stories. But all the Greek dramatists were dealing with the traditions and subject matter of the religion of their country. We cannot come to the performance of a Greek play with the same feelings as a Greek audience. The Greek drama can never interest an average modern English audience except as an antique curio. We may be quite sure that it aroused a different set of feelings in a Greek audience, and that these feelings were to some extent of a religious nature.

We must not however infer that these religious feelings aroused in the Greek audience had the same lofty soul-saving power as the feelings aroused in American and

British audiences of today by our modern religious masterpieces of drama such as 'Have you found Jesus?' and 'Maria, the Early Martyr.' See the testimony on this point of some hundreds of American and British clergymen and ministers who have been moved to advertise the genuine soul-saving power of these plays.

No, the Greeks cannot have been so laudably bent on the great business of saving their souls in the theater as are our American and British audiences today. 'Prometheus' and the 'Agememnon' and 'Œdipus' cannot have saved so many souls as 'Have you found Jesus?' and 'Maria, the Early Martyr.' Again, the Greek tragedies were passably well written, but not with the same luscious unction of salvation as the recent "holy, oily" successes of our American and British stage. When it comes to the vital business part of religion, either on or off the stage, no race can hope to do the trick like us Anglo-Saxons. And I should have been inclined to yield the palm in this respect to the Americans, had not the Bishop of Liverpool shown himself to be abreast of the times, when the other day, in a truly business-like



spirit he urged the advantages of advertising religion.

These things are by the way. Be they as they may, nobody can dispute that when it comes to mixing up amusement and religion in the theater we modern Americans and Englishmen can "lick creation."\* The Greeks cannot have resigned themselves as we do to lose all sense of drama in the theater, in pursuit of the far more important business of saving our souls.

Still we may take it, that the impression made upon the Greek audience by such tragedies as the 'Agememnon' and 'Œdipus' was not wholly a dramatic one. The pleasure they sought in the theater was not wholly and merely the pleasure given by drama. This makes it a little doubtful whether the 'Agememnon' and 'Œdipus' can be accepted in contravention of Brunetière's law—even if they do entirely contravene it. All that

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\*I adorn this paper with as much slang as possible, in admiration of the sparkling dialog of some of our most successful recent British and American plays. But the deficiencies in my education, and the nature of the discussion limit my opportunities, and I am obliged for the most part to relapse into plain grammatical English.

can be safely affirmed is that when the drama and religion get mixed up in the theater, much that is not strictly dramatic, much that is quite undramatic, will interest and hold, and even enthrall an audience.

X On the whole however, Mr. William Archer in pointing out that Agamemnon and Œdipus are passive under their misfortunes, that there is no will struggle in their great scenes, which are yet indisputably dramatic—in marking this Mr. William Archer has established a strong position against Brunetière, so far as the Greek drama is concerned. I am obliged to hand over to Mr. Archer the scalps of Agamemnon and Œdipus.

✓ I do not think he is equally successful in the examples of Western European drama, which he brings against Brunetière. Before we proceed to examine Mr. Archer's more modern instances, let us enquire what would be the effect upon us of a play, perfectly constructed from beginning to end according to Brunetière's principle; that is a play which would exhibit a series of conflicts of human will, manifesting themselves in action, from the rise to the fall of the curtain without the least intermission.

We get some approach to such a play in the cruder and more violent specimens of popular melodrama. What is the result? Character drawing has to be sacrificed. There are only impossibly good heroes and impossibly wicked villains. Again, there is too much plot. The action proceeding at such a violent rate is plainly seen to be impossible. Further, the play misses its chief end—that of giving an impression of life. It does not interest us, because it is obviously false and unreal. Moreover it becomes monotonous; it loses variety, therefore it quickly tires an audience. The most successful melodramas are those into which "comic relief" is most abundantly introduced, and where this sense of will conflict is relaxed or removed at times. But even these scenes of "comic relief" are most successful when they contain a conflict of wit, or of humor, or of mere words.

We see then that if Brunetière's law is true and valid, if the drama is really a struggle of will power, there is a triple necessity laid upon it that this struggle should often be kept below the surface of the action. If it is always emergent, always apparent, always



demonstrating itself, the dramatist must renounce his claim to subtle or even truthful character drawing. 'He will write a crude, violent play, incessantly strident and restless and shrieking; he will give his audience no interludes of change and repose; he will tire and irritate them by his lack of variety. Above all his play will not give the impression of life. For even the most determined of us is only intermittently bent upon any course of action. We must eat and sleep and carry on the trivial business of life for the greater part of our time.

For all these reasons the struggle of wills in a play must often lose itself beneath the surface of the action, as a river sometimes loses itself underground, but still keeps flowing. Or sometimes indeed this struggle of wills will be entirely concealed, like the girders supporting a house under apparent solid masonry, which would fall in ruins without the hidden straps of iron. We see the iron girders only when we remove the bricks and look beneath.

Let us keep in mind this triple necessity laid upon the dramatist of occasionally or frequently diverting the current of will power

and submerging it beneath the surface of the action. Though hidden it will yet be the dominant moving power of the play, as a river even when burrowing beneath and undermining a mountain, is yet the governing factor in shaping the landscape. Let us also remember that Brunetière does not claim that in all plays the will struggle must be concentrated in a prolonged duel between the two leading personages. According to the necessities of the story, it may be divided and diffused between opposing groups of persons; or split into divers tributary manifestations—here between two minor personages; there between a character or characters and destiny, or circumstance, or social law. Further let us again insist that many things which are not strictly dramatic hold and amuse us in the theater, and indeed may rivet our attention—pretty faces, dancing, gorgeous scenery, songs, processions, etc. Molière and Congreve were often forced to divert and hold the attention of their spectators by dragging in songs and dances.

With all these considerations in our minds let us proceed to examine those plays of West-



ern Europe which Mr. Archer gives as notable instances of drama that disprove Brunetière's law. The first of these is 'Othello.' But surely Othello is struggling all through the latter part of the play, if not directly with Iago, yet with the successive tangles of evidence which Iago is binding round him; with his own doubts and suspicions and fears; with his own growing sense of crumbling domestic happiness and military renown. Othello is by no means passive like Agamemnon and Œdipus. He makes us imagine what Agamemnon and Œdipus would have been if Shakspeare had handled them. Othello is indeed blindfolded like Œdipus, but he does not accept his doom. Othello puts up a good fight against the fate that he feels, but does not see. But even granted that Othello is passive, which he is not, Othello is not the protagonist of the play. Iago is the real protagonist, as every actor who has played Othello knows. And where in all drama is such a superb energy of pure will, ceaselessly driving and scheming its way thru and round every obstacle; undiverted by passion; unmoved by pity; unshaken by remorse; opera-

tive in every scene of the play from its opening lines to the closing

O Spartan dog!  
More fell than anguish, hunger or the sea?

Where else in drama is such pressure, alertness and sublimity of pure unconquerable will as in Iago? To me the play of Othello offers a shining instance of Brunetière's law in full play—accepting Brunetière's own definition.

'As you like it' is Mr. Archer's next "awful example." "Where is the conflict in 'As you like it'?" Mr. Archer asks. Certainly there is no continuous personal conflict in this delightful comedy. Many of the scenes that please us are not drama; and even while they please us, we may easily perceive that the pleasure that we take in them is not the true pleasure of drama. And because the drama in 'As you like it' is so weak and loose and intermittent, it has never had a great and striking success in the theater. The character of Rosalind is so winning that it will always draw us to the theater if it is played by a favorite actress. But I think whatever success 'As you like it' has won on the boards may be largely ascribed to the vogue of some

leading lady. I question if it has ever been so popular as to make money for the management; while I suspect that in several instances much money has been lost in forcing a run. But there is much delightful word conflict in 'As you like it'; between Rosalind and Orlando; between Rosalind and Celia; between Rosalind and Touchstone. And there is much finely contrasted character. These things, if they may be claimed as comedy, are certainly not drama. They are amongst the many other things that, as I have already noted, interest and hold an audience in a theater without being drama. They are the kickshaws which we eat and enjoy; but they do not make a dinner.

But beyond these things there are a few elements of will conflict in 'As you like it', very weak and scattered and inconsequent it is true, not much related to each other, of little force or continuity. Yet take these away from the already tenuous framework, and the comedy would drop to pieces. It would scarcely be actable. They are the precarious straps and props that do really hold it together as a play.

'Ghosts' is the next play which Mr.



Archer opposes to Brunetière's theory. And here he has a very strong case indeed. In this terrible yet fascinating play Ibsen approaches the Greek construction. It is very simple. The drama opens at a late climax of the story. The events and passions that have led to the present scenes happened long ago; yet they are a living part of the body of action, and must have been dramatic in themselves. In the present scenes Ibsen mirrors in a large vague way these past characters and passions and events.

No art is so rigidly economic as the drama. One sentence may give us all that is practically worth knowing of a man's past history. As for instance, when in 'She Stoops to Conquer' Gregory says of the ould Grouse in the gunroom story, "We've laughed at that story any time the last twenty years." Mr. Hardcastle's life and character are virtually painted there.

Ibsen in 'Ghosts' darkly mirrors in the present action the dreadful outlines of the past; darkly shows us bygone sins and passions in whose transactions the human will must have played its part. There must be some picturing of these in our minds as we

witness the actual scenes of 'Ghosts.' The stricken survivors in the play are like the stricken survivors from the Titanic who brought with them from the far mid-Atlantic to the New York dock the tokens and images of past disaster, and forced the spectators to reconstruct the whole tragedy.

But the shuddering far backward glances we take from the successive platforms in 'Ghosts' scarcely impress us with a sense of any past will conflict that is operative in the present action. It can scarcely be urged that either in the mirrored past, or the actual present, there is any dominant, or even significantly latent struggle of the human will that moves the action of the play, or contributes to its effect, or that even holds it together. Yet nobody who has seen 'Ghosts' on the stage can deny that thruout it is intense, poignant drama. In successfully bringing forward three such signal instances as the 'Agememnon,' 'Œdipus' and 'Ghosts' to refute Brunetière, Mr. Archer may claim to have disproved the universality of Brunetière's law.

What then is the clue to the absorbing interest which 'Ghosts' arouses in spectators, an

interest which is indisputably that of drama?

What has 'Ghosts' in common with 'Agamemnon,' 'Œdipus' and all other plays, or scenes of plays, where our attention is gripped and sustained? To reduce it to a general statement—is it not this, that a character in the play is "up against" some opposing circumstance, or person, or fate? In 'Ghosts' Oswald is "up against" the *Spirochaete pallida*,—which, I am told, is a formidable, though a merely microscopic antagonist. I think that many other modern plays and scenes of plays may be found on examination to shake our faith in the universality of Brunetière's law. So far as I remember, the dramatic interest of the 'Bells' as Irving played it,—certainly the climax of dramatic interest in the last act—was not due to an assertion of will, but rather to the fact that Matthias, like Agamemnon and Œdipus and Oswald, was "up against a tough proposition." And in many trial scenes that have been successful on the stage, it will I think be found that the dramatic interest arises not from a conflict or assertion of will, but again from the fact that some person, generally

*opposition*



*g doesn't attack =*  
the hero, is "up against a tough proposition."

Mr. Archer having so strongly proved his case against the universality of Brunetière's law, we need not dwell upon his further illustrations, except as they seem to be fallacious or questionable, and to point to the existence of some more general and more inclusive law than the one formulated by Brunetière. Mr. Archer goes on to say "No one can say that the balcony scene in 'Romeo and Juliet' is undramatic." But can anyone say that it is truly dramatic? Would not the play be a complete whole, would the action suffer materially, would the play be less comprehensible, if the balcony scene were merely indicated, or cut down to a fourth of its length, as it probably would be in a modern prose play? The scene does indeed hold us, but not by its essential drama. A play entirely made up of such scenes would not be dramatic. Is not the balcony scene, as a whole, lyric rather than dramatic? Again, to take the opposite side for a moment, might it not be plausibly argued that in all love scenes there is a subtle implication of an after physical conflict, wherein each combatant struggles for

mastery in self-surrender? In that sense all love scenes are dramatic because they secretly indicate an impulse towards dominancy in self-surrender, towards self-assertion in self-sacrifice.

Mr. Archer also advances the scene in 'Paolo and Francesca,' the death scene of Cleopatra, and the banquet scene in 'Macbeth.' These are scenes that necessarily link together other scenes of struggle in plays where the human will is a dominant motor of the action. 'Paolo and Francesca' is not a very dramatic story thruout. Dante has seized its one moment and left little for any follower to glean. Dramatists might be content to leave it to Dante. The pastoral scene in 'A Winter's Tale' is not dramatic, except in the moments and scenes where the story of the play intervenes and is carried forward.

Mr. Archer says "In the whole range of drama there is scarcely a passage which one would call more dramatic than the screen scene in the 'School for Scandal'; yet it would be the veriest quibbling to argue that any appreciable part of its effect arises from the clash of will against will. This whole com-



edy indeed, suffices to show the emptiness of the theory."

On the contrary, I think it might be fairly argued that, granting Brunetière's explanation and enlargement of his law according to Mr. Archer's own translation, viz—"one of us thrown living on the stage there to struggle against . . . social law, against one of his fellow mortals, against . . . the ambitions, the interests, the folly, the malevolence of those who surround him—" granted this, it may be fairly argued that the 'School for Scandal' falls as comedy within the operation of Brunetière's law. Comedy does not demand so fierce and intense an assertion of the human will as drama. It is concerned with less serious affairs. Its struggle is not against fate, and "the mysterious powers or natural forces which limit and belittle us." Its struggle, involving the human will, is against the prejudices, follies, whims, foibles and small vices of mankind. In ordinary talk we distinguish between comedy and drama.

Granted this, and it is expressly granted in Brunetière's definition as quoted by Mr. Archer, there is a very real, tho largely im-

plied, conflict of the human will in the 'School for Scandal.' Joseph has a very strong will to seduce Lady Teazle, to blacken Charles, and to become Sir Oliver's heir. The opposition between Joseph and Charles, tho Charles is not very conscious of it, and tho it is not obtrusive, is yet the foundation arch of the 'School for Scandal.' Take it away, and the play totters, if it does not fall. Then there are vivid will conflicts, of course in a comedy vein, between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle in the delightful quarrel scenes. These will struggles of the earlier acts are carried forward and underlie the screen scene. They are what make it a piece of drama. Withdraw them and their implications, and the screen scene would almost lose its dramatic effect. In opposition to Mr. Archer's dictum that the 'School for Scandal' shows the emptiness of Brunetière's theory, it may be claimed that it rather conspicuously illustrates Brunetière's law working in comedy. It is questionable whether Congreve's absence from the English stage for the last hundred years or more is not largely due to the fact that there is a comparative absence of will conflict working continuously thru

the play and woven into a connected scheme. In none of Congreve's four comedies is there a will conflict that much interests us, except that of *Mirabell* and *Millamant*; and these scenes are vivid and alive when they are acted today. *Maskwell* indeed has a determined will, but we cannot believe in his preposterous schemes and plots. Congreve's construction is always loose and inconsequent; and it is this lack of constructive power that has prevented him from being a popular dramatist. For Congreve's wit is far brighter and more piercing than *Sheridan's*, and his character drawing is larger, truer and more vigorous wherever the two dramatists can be compared.

Before quitting the '*School for Scandal*' we may notice as a clue to some larger and more general law of the drama than *Brunetière's*, that *Joseph* is "up against" *Lady Teazle's* resolution not to lose her chastity when it comes to the final test; that he is "up against" *Sir Oliver's* determination to try the characters of his nephews; and also "up against" the old *Nabob's* sneaking fondness for *Charles*; that *Charles*, tho unconsciously, is "up against" *Joseph's* wiles and



hypocrisy; that he is also "up against" Sir Oliver's plan for trying his character; that Sir Peter is unconsciously "up against" Joseph's wiles and hypocrisy, and "up against" Lady Teazle's possible seduction by Joseph; that Lady Teazle is "up against" Joseph's wiles and her own lightness and carelessness. All these leading characters are "up against" one of the obstacles included in Brunetière's long list of opposing circumstances—not perhaps very violently and rigidly "up against" these facts and circumstances and human wiles, as they would be in tragedy and serious drama, but sufficiently, and for the most part lightheartedly, as befits the characters in comedy.

I have now analyzed each of the plays and scenes that Mr. Archer brings forward to refute Brunetière's theory. I have shown that many of these so far from disproving it, do indeed go far to prove it; or at least to indicate that Brunetière was groping and stumbling on the right path towards a universal law of the drama. Indeed Mr. Archer himself lends some countenance to Brunetière when he says that "conflict is one of the most dramatic elements in life, and that

many dramas—perhaps most—do as a matter of fact turn upon strife of one sort or another.” And further, that “a stand-up fight between will and will is no doubt one of the intensest forms of drama.”

When in addition to granting this to Brunetière, Mr. Archer brings forward such plays as ‘Agamemnon,’ ‘Œdipus,’ and ‘Ghosts,’ and shows that we can have great, intense drama, certainly without the present assertion of human will, largely without the past assertion of human will carried forward into the present scenes; and also without a conscious fight against fate, or opposing circumstance—when Mr. Archer shows this, he has proved Brunetière’s theory, not indeed to be quite empty and worthless, but rather to be suggestive of, and included in some larger and more general law which is of universal application.

Having, as he claims to have done, demolished Brunetière’s theory, Mr. Archer goes on to have a theory of his own. Here Mr. Archer might perhaps have remembered that Archibald Spofforth in his exhaustive, but rather exhausting, treatise on ‘Radical Fallibilities of the Human Brain’ comments very

severely on our inveterate propensity to propound theories, and shows how imperfect an instrument the human brain is for this purpose. In a very elaborate mathematical argument, which I was not able to follow, but which all my experience and observation prompt me to accept most cordially, Archibald Spofforth claims to prove that, taking the masses of theories already propounded by mankind on all subjects, the probability of any given theory being right is as 1 to 241,743.\* This it must be owned is a very sporting chance, and the enormous odds against Mr. Archer may well excuse him if he has formed a wrong theory of the drama; as indeed they may plead for some leniency towards myself if I am venturesome enough to launch a theory of my own.

"What then," Mr. Archer asks, "is the essence of drama if conflict be not it? What is the common quality of themes, scenes, and incidents which we recognize as specifically

\*In matters of Theology, Spofforth claims that the odds against any given theory being right are increased, and stand at 4,741,604 to 1—an estimate which seems on the face of it to be over cautious. But theological matters, interesting as they are in themselves, need not detain us here.



dramatic? Perhaps we shall scarcely come nearer to a helpful definition than if we say that the essence of drama is *crisis*." Thus speaks Mr. Archer. He then goes on to sort out his crises, dividing them into those which are undramatic, and those which are dramatic. He establishes, without a doubt, that when a crisis is dramatic, it is drama. On the other hand when a crisis is undramatic, it is not drama. And unfortunately it appears that the crises which are undramatic are just as numerous and just as intrinsically important as those which are dramatic. Crises ought not to behave in this inconsistent way, if they are to prove Mr. Archer's theory. He has rejected "conflict" as the essence of drama. Yet I think if he carefully considers those crises which he calls dramatic he will find there is always a sense of conflict, active or implied; and often a conflict of the human will. At least we may claim that some character is always, consciously or unconsciously "up against" some rather "tough proposition." Mr. Archer says, "A play is a more or less rapidly developing crisis in destiny or circumstance; and a dramatic scene is a crisis within a crisis, clearly

furthering the ultimate event." This is very well put, and we need not dispute it. But might it not be paraphrased as "A play is a more or less rapidly developing conflict with destiny or circumstance, and a dramatic scene is a conscious or unconscious conflict within a scheme of larger conflict, clearly furthering the ultimate event"? At any rate a conflict is always dramatic, and a crisis, as Mr. Archer takes some trouble to show, is often undramatic.

Perhaps I may be forgiven if I obtrude my own practice and experience for a moment. Mr. Archer's book is, as I have said, full of valuable hints and suggestions to young playwrights. On page 27 he says "The author might often ask himself with advantage whether he could not strengthen his obstacle and so accentuate the struggle which forms the matter of his play." This is sound and admirable advice. In nearly all cases a play succeeds or fails with a popular audience, on the right or wrong conduct of its plot. Dialog, consistency of motive, truth and sincerity of character drawing, are weighty matters indeed, and of the chief importance when we are measuring the permanent value

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of a play. But they are of little value, they scarcely come into the account at all, unless the plot is first carefully designed and established thruout. To build a play with good literature and truthful observation of character, without first having a complete design, is as though an architect should take care to choose the best materials for his house; to see that his bricks and wood and iron are of the best; and then to take no heed that the elevation is right, that the kitchen and living rooms and staircases are practicable, that the house is a compact and convenient place to live in.

Now the interest of the plot should be held to the end, and the main motives of the play should sustain the structure thruout. In devising the structure of a play, and in trying to make the story hold its interest to the fall of the curtain, I have constantly found it necessary to "strengthen the obstacle" as Mr. Archer suggests. This strengthening the obstacle has often taken the form of bringing two wills into conflict, or of increasing the apprehension of the coming will conflict, or of suspending a final and decisive will conflict until the latest moment, meantime

emphasizing its imminency. Mr. Archer has noted that "a stand up fight between will and will is one of the intensest forms of drama." It is also one of the most effective on the stage, the surest to hold an audience. As a matter of experience I have found these scenes of will conflict the easiest to write; not indeed in the sense of calling for little effort, but in the sense of easily and surely arousing a swift, impetuous, unflagging energy to deal with them. They generally write themselves—after long reflection and preparation. To say nothing of shorter scenes, I have three times written scenes of sustained conflict that fill the greater part of an act. Two of them were written at single sittings of two hours and three hours respectively—that is they were for the most part written at a far greater speed than I generally write matter requiring no thought. The other was written in one long sitting of about four hours, and a second sitting the next day of an hour. The two former were drama; the latter was comedy. These instances have some bearing on Brunetière's theory, and I hope this may excuse me for introducing personal matter.

My own experience strongly disposes me to support Brunetière's law. But in the instances of the 'Agamemnon,' 'Œdipus,' and 'Ghosts' Mr. Archer has certainly disproved its universal application.

I have shown that Mr. Archer's crises may comfortably lie down alongside Brunetière's will conflicts. They are largely of the same order, and are in many respects identical. Is there no means of finally and completely "reconciling" these eminent critics?

I have a great mind to discover a law of the drama of my own. It will be urged that it is unnecessary to add to the prevailing confusion which exists in the modern drama. And even if I "reconciled" Brunetière and Mr. Archer, what about the other eminent critics and dramatists who have discovered that it is the first business of the playwright not to have a story or a plot, but to have "ideas," and a "mission," to sweep up social abuses, to debate endlessly upon social questions and disputed points in sociology?

It is a sad reflection that all the successful dramatists of the past have been as lamentably ignorant of modern psychology and sociology as the early Ephesian converts were



of the Third Person in the Trinity. They had not so much as heard of so august an Abstraction. In consequence of a similar lamentable ignorance of august Abstractions, like psychology and sociology and heredity, the successful dramatists of the past were obliged to construct their plays on the vicious first principle of telling an interesting story in a well framed concrete scheme; and by this means their plays have secured a permanent popularity,—which is a reprehensible thing to lovers of “ideas.”

But what modern playwright will take infinite trouble to learn the difficult task of constructing a play, when he can gain the reputation of being not only a great dramatist but also a profound thinker by the easy expedient of tossing a few psychological or sociological “ideas” about the stage with the careless freedom of a happy haymaker?

The present moment then is not auspicious for the enunciation of a law of the drama. It is very hard to obey laws; it is very easy to have “ideas.” “Ideas” enforce no restrictions; they need not even be pursued; they need only to be dangled, and



aired, and left to float away. I hesitate then to unfold my law of the drama, because if it chances to be true it may be destructive to so many recent masterpieces of the harum scarum and Pentonville-omnibus schools of drama.

On the other hand, if it is a true law, there are enormous odds that it will be disregarded and neglected—for the time; in as much as it runs counter to the prevailing notions and fashions of the moment. So perhaps I may safely venture to discover a law of the drama of my own, in the security that it cannot do very much harm, as very few people will pay any attention to it.

It must necessarily be a very broad and general law if it is not only to "reconcile" Brunetière and Mr. Archer, but also to apply to any and every scene, and to any and every play that we can bring to test it. Bearing in mind then all the arguments and illustrations that have been used in this paper, and remembering that in the theater many things interest and amuse us which are not true drama, may we not formulate the universal law of drama as follows?—

Drama arises when any person or persons in a

play are consciously or unconsciously "up against" some antagonistic person, or circumstance, or fortune. It is often more intense, when as in 'Œdipus,' the audience is aware of the obstacle, and the person himself, or persons on the stage are unaware of it. Drama arises thus, and continues when or till the person or persons are aware of the obstacle; it is sustained so long as we watch the reaction physical, mental, or spiritual, of the person or persons to the opposing person, or circumstance, or fortune. It relaxes as this reaction subsides, and ceases when the reaction is complete. This reaction of a person to an obstacle is most arresting and intense when the obstacle takes the form of another human will in almost balanced collision.

It will be seen that this law overlaps and includes Brunetière's will conflicts and Mr. Archer's crises; and that it "reconciles" them. It shows us what is drama, and what is not drama, in each of the scenes and plays that we have analyzed; it explains the failure of certain other scenes to interest us; it indicates those scenes which, not being dramatic in themselves, do yet hold our attention in the theater, because they are necessary links, supplying information about character or events; or because they are restful interludes between scenes of true drama.

This law can I think, be applied to any play, or to any scene of any play,

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ancient or modern, and made the test of its dramatic value. If in asserting its universality I am claiming too much for it, I shall be glad to be confronted with instances of plays or scenes where it does not apply. I will then withdraw it, or widen it, or adopt any other law that can be shown to have a universal application. Perhaps some amusing scenes in farce may be found to be largely exempt from its sway; but farce, by its very name being "stuffing," that is "padding," does not pretend to be drama. But, this possible exception granted, I think the law I have formulated will be found to be a veritable universal law, which will hold good always and everywhere, and can be equally used as a touchstone to all scenes and to all plays; to tragedy, drama, comedy or farce.

As I have stated the law it appears to be somewhat lengthy and involved. But it can scarcely be shortened or simplified if it is to be explicit, and if it is to cover the whole area of drama. If however Mr. Archer would allow us to add "suspense" to "crisis" as a chief element of drama, then the formula "suspense, crisis—suspense, crisis—suspense, crisis," almost renders a succinct



statement of the law of drama. And if we do not insist upon the conscious exertion of the human will, which tho of frequent exhibition in drama, is not omnipresent and omnipotent as Brunetière supposes—if we enlarge Brunetière's law into "conflict impending, conflict raging—conflict impending, conflict raging—conflict impending, conflict raging—", then again we get a short formula which almost renders a succinct statement of the law of drama. And in most instances the general outline of the action of the same successful play would be equally well described as a succession of suspenses and crises, or as a succession of conflicts impending and conflicts raging, carried thru ascending and accelerated climaxes from the beginning to the end of a connected scheme. Thus it appears that our law includes and "reconciles" Brunetière's will conflicts with Mr. Archer's crises, and Mr. Archer, instead of being opposed to Brunetière as he imagines, is in substantial agreement with him—that is when a playwright is allowed to expand and expound and interpret their respective theories, and to find places for them in a law which is large enough to



accommodate them both. I kindle with justifiable pride to find that I have "reconciled" these eminent critics.

Mr. Archer in dismissing Brunetière's theory as inadmissible says, "For a sufficient account of the matter we need go no further than the simple psychological observation that human nature loves a fight, whether it be with clubs, or with swords, with tongues or with brains." ('Playmaking' p. 26.) But this psychological observation gives us an insight into the permanent relation of the drama to life. Reduced to its simplest elements life itself is mainly a fight; it is the commonest simile in all literature. Reduced to its simplest elements, drama is mainly the representation of a fight, a conflict of some sort. War in some form, military, industrial, social or spiritual is the law of our being; it is the necessary lever of all human advance. Death is peace, as every tombstone shows. Life is war—of some kind. Thus we see the reason that successful drama is so largely made up of conflict, conscious or unconscious. It is then fundamentally like life; fundamentally, it is life. | For when there is what Brunetière calls

an obstacle, even if the persons on the stage are unaware of it, we, the spectators, know there is a vital conflict, actual or imminent, and we set ourselves to watch its development. It is not the passivity of Agamemnon, of Œdipus, or of Oswald, which gives us the sense of drama. It is their impending reaction to the obstacle that rouses our interest. This response may be bodily, mental or spiritual; but it is an opposition, a reaction if not of the will, yet a reaction of the man's nature or character; a kind of conflict; and therefore it is drama.

We will now inquire into the relations of drama to fiction,—of the play to the novel. Dramatic criticism is perpetually recurring to this matter; and we may profitably consider it here, especially as Brunetière gives considerable space to it in his essay. Mr. Archer also has a short analysis of the differentiation of the play from the novel. And “’fore God, they are both in a tale.” They both mark an antithesis between drama and fiction, between the play and the novel. Mr. Archer does not press this point so strongly as Brunetière. Mr. Archer says (‘Playmaking,’ p. 29)—“The drama may be called the art of

crises, as fiction is the art of gradual developments. It is the slowness of its processes which differentiates the typical novel from the typical play. If the novelist does not take advantage of the facilities offered by his form for portraying gradual change whether in the way of growth or decay, he renounces his own birthright to trespass on the domain of the dramatist."

Thus again speaks Mr. Archer. But surely crises, and crises of the order which Mr. Archer has noted as dramatic, do occur with frequency in many standard novels, and are not prevented from being drama, because the novelist may have also taken advantage of the facilities offered by his form, for portraying gradual change.

Take the average detective novel. The author may indeed, even in this comparatively low type of fiction, "take advantage of the facilities offered by his form for portraying gradual changes" that lead up to a crisis. But would he "renounce his birthright" if, because they are dramatic, he omitted the crises which indeed make the chief interest and attraction of his novel? Why is he less a novelist because he introduces dramatic



crises into his story, and uses them with virtually the same effect that a dramatist uses them in a play?

Go a step higher. Have Victor Hugo and the elder Dumas renounced their birthrights as novelists because their stories are an almost constant succession of dramatic crises and scenes and events? When we speak of Dickens and Balzac do the scenes which spring up in our memory indicate that a novelist is pursuing his true vocation only when he avoids all that is dramatic? Would all these writers have been greater masters of fiction if they had omitted these scenes, or if they had studiously treated them in the least dramatic way possible? Would they not have immeasurably lessened the effect of their stories, and indeed largely renounced their birthright as novelists? Is Thackeray renouncing his birthright as a novelist in the scene of Rawdon Crawley's return and the discovery of Lord Steyne and Becky?—a scene which can almost be bodily transferred to the stage? Is Thomas Hardy renouncing his birthright as a novelist in the memorable scene of the confession in 'Tess'? Is he not indeed there claiming his birthright, not only



as a novelist, but also, as in so many other of his vividly dramatic scenes—is he not, implicitly claiming his birthright as a great potential dramatist, lost to the English stage because he has never learnt the actual business of the theater? A hundred times be it proclaimed that one main reason that we have no great English national drama is that neither our creative men of letters, nor our critical men of letters, are men of the theater.

Brunetière asserts even more strongly than Mr. Archer that there is a direct antagonism between the art of drama and the art of fiction—"The drama and the novel are not the same thing; or rather each is the reverse of the other." And he goes on to compare 'Gil Blas' with the 'Marriage of Figaro.' "Gil Blas is subject to circumstances; he does not try to dominate them. He does not act; he is acted upon," says Brunetière. But because a certain character in a particular novel is passive and does not exercise his will, is no reason that another character in another novel should not have a determined will, and struggle consciously with adverse circumstances and persons.

Brunetière sums up, "The novel is there-

fore the contrary of the drama." This dictum will not hold for a moment, in presence of the instances I have quoted of tremendous dramatic scenes that have largely contributed to the reputations of great novelists. Instances might be indefinitely multiplied. Even in the novelist who often seems to flout the drama, and who always seems to flout the theater, whose methods seem to be intentionally anti-theatrical, if not anti-dramatic—even in Anatole France, there is much essential drama, witness the scenes in 'Histoire Comique'; and the memorable scene where M. Bergeret discovers his wife and his favorite pupil, with its superb portrayal of the astonishingly truthful sequences and reactions in the mind and soul of M. Bergeret. It is there we get essential drama.

The fundamental antagonism which Brunetière and Mr. Archer have discovered between drama and fiction does not exist. Nearly all the great novelists have gained much reputation by writing scenes which have the true marks of drama; which exhibit the human will in action and in conflict; which portray crises of the order which Mr. Archer calls dramatic; which could easily be

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not drama

transformed into a scene of a play; and which in some instances could be put on the stage almost as they appear in the novel. So far as these scenes are written as narrative or description they are essential drama, which only needs to be put into dialog to become actual drama. So far as they are written in dialog these are already actual drama—tho in nearly all instances they are not organically related to other dramatic scenes so as to form a concrete scheme of action, that is to say, a play.

What then is the true relation of drama to fiction, of the play to the novel? Wherein, and to what extent, and over what territory of human life and experience are they differentiated?

Brunetière says "The drama and the novel are not the same thing." This is largely true. "The novel is the contrary of the drama." This is quite false. If the law of drama that I have formulated above is valid and universal, it is apparent that whenever and wherever a scene or situation occurs that fulfils one of the obligations of the law, there we get essential drama. And it matters not where we find such a



scene or situation; whether in a play, or in the pages of a novel, or in history, or in a newspaper, or in real life. It is true essential drama; the same as gold is gold whether it be found in minute scattered atoms in the waters of the sea; or in rather more tangible quantities in a Welsh mountain; or in visible specks in quartz, or in a river-bed; or palpable and compact in a nugget; or minted and stamped for circulation in a sovereign. "The drama and the novel are not the same thing." No, but the novel approaches the play, and tends to contain a play or a number of plays according to the force and number of its dramatic scenes, and according as these scenes can be made to fall into an organic connected sequence, or into more than one organic connected sequences.

It is strange that neither Brunetière nor Mr. Archer has perceived that the true relation of the novel to the play, of the epic to drama, is finely exposed in Aristotle's 'Poetics' (xxiii and xxiv.) The epic, which is roughly the novel, differs, says Aristotle, from the drama on the scale on which it is constructed. The epic has a great capacity



for enlarging its dimensions, and we can see the reason. In the drama we cannot imitate several actions carried on at one and the same time; we must confine ourselves to the action on the stage and the part taken by the players. Aristotle points out that an epic may supply materials for the subjects of many tragedies. And he says, in direct contradiction to Brunetière and Mr. Archer, that the plot of a work in narrative ought manifestly to be constructed on dramatic principles. It should have a beginning, a middle and an end. The parts, with the exception of song and scenery, are the same. Thus, so far from finding that fiction and the drama are essentially different, Aristotle maintains that they are fundamentally the same.

Professor Butcher in commenting on Aristotle says ('Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art,' p. 280): "The general law of unity laid down in the 'Poetics' for an epic is almost the same as for the drama, but the drama forms a more compact and serried whole. Its events are in more direct relation with the development of character; *its incidents are never incidents and*

*nothing more."* This is a very important statement for a young playwright to remember. It implies the rigorous economy of dramatic construction; the necessity of introducing no incident that is not a vital part of the main action, and that does not advance the main action; the necessity of introducing no incident that does not exhibit, and, if possible, develop character, in addition to being itself an action strictly within and strictly related to the main action. Nothing is good in a play that is not good in relation to the whole of it.

Professor Butcher proceeds, "The sequence of parts in a play is more inevitable—morally more inevitable—than in a story where the external facts and events have an independent value of their own. . . . The epic being of wider compass, can admit many episodes, which serve to fill in the pauses of the action or diversify the interest. They give embellishment and variety to the narrative. The epic moreover advances slowly, retarding incidents by which the *dénouement* is delayed. Further, owing to the number of its minor actions, the epic, while keeping its essential unity contains the

plots of many tragedies, whereas the drama rejects this multiplicity of incidents; it is of closer tissue, *pressing forward to an end which controls its entire structure.* . . .

The action then of the drama is concentrated, while that of the epic is large and manifold. . . The epic is a story of the past; the drama a representation in the present. . . the epic storyteller can take his time. . . "

Taken altogether this makes it clear that the raw stuff of fiction and the raw stuff of drama are the same; and further that even the methods of drama and the methods of fiction are to some extent the same; the chief difference being that the methods of fiction are slower, looser, more free, more unrestrained. Fiction can do many more things than the drama, but it cannot strike so hard and instantly. So instead of saying with Brunetière, "The novel and the drama are exactly opposite, the one to the other. . . the novel is the contrary to the drama," we should say "Fiction everywhere overlaps the drama and contains the drama. Drama is one species of fiction; drama does not essentially differ from fiction; it is a highly spe-

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cialized, highly organic, highly concentrated, infinitely difficult form of fiction." But the contrast which Brunetière has noted between the drama and certain forms of fiction is a very suggestive one. It is not, as he supposes, the contrast between the drama on one hand and fiction on the other. The contrast which Brunetière establishes is between that fiction which is relatively undramatic, or which avoids the exhibition of whatever essential drama it contains—between these kinds of fiction on the one hand, and the drama and dramatic fiction on the other. The mere story of 'Gil Blas' contains much material of drama. The delightful scenes wherein Gil Blas figures as a doctor would almost of themselves make a comedy—if there were a Molière to fuse and organize them. Again there is much essential drama in 'Madame Bovary'; but Flaubert gives it to us in narrative and description. A dramatist could extract a play from 'Madame Bovary,' but he would necessarily omit many of the most telling episodes; and he would necessarily abdicate the beauties and delicacies of Flaubert's style. He could not leave with us the same general impres-



sion that Flaubert leaves. If he were a very great dramatist he might give us an impression as striking and vivid as Flaubert, but it would be a different impression. Nor could he give us, except in a large rough suggestive way, the *Madame Bovary* of Flaubert. *Madame Bovary* on the stage would shift and change according to the personality, the complexion, the manner, the gesture, the vitality, the methods and technical training, and on certain nights, according to the present state of the temper and digestion, of the different actresses who played the part. But there is much essential drama in the story of *Madame Bovary*.

From all this it appears that the novelist having not only a much wider domain than the dramatist, having indeed an unlimited domain; being also comparatively unfettered in that domain, whereas the dramatist in his much narrower compass is fettered by the manifold chains of a rigid law; a set of present day conventions; and the eternal necessity of being interpreted by actual human beings who may be ill-adapted to embody his creations, and in modern realistic drama are always, more or less physically unsuited to their

parts—from all this, it appears that the art of a novelist is much easier to practise, and therein to win a lasting literary reputation than the art of the dramatist. Indeed Archibald Spofforth, in his essay on the 'Difficulties and Discouragements of the Dramatis,' computes that granted the same natural intellectual gifts, a literary reputation may be won as a novelist at exactly one twenty-seventh cost of the pains and energy that it takes to win a literary reputation as a dramatist. One gets a little tired of these elaborate mathematical calculations of Spofforth, which are always difficult for a plain simple man to follow. And in this case I cannot but think he has overlooked some important factor, and consequently has outrageously overstated his case. Speaking from personal experience, I should say that Spofforth would have been nearer the truth if he had said that a literary reputation may be made as a novelist at a tenth of the expenditure of pains and energy that it takes to make a kindred reputation as a dramatist. This of course applies to England only. They have a different scale of judgments and rewards in France; and also a different receptivity for the drama.

In America the matter is, I believe, in abeyance, pending developments of the national grammar, language, and literature.

But though Brunetière may be in error in saying that the drama and fiction are exactly opposite and contrary to each other, he is again fruitful and suggestive, in saying that "the quality of will measures and determines, in its turn, the dramatic value of each work in its species." This perhaps may be accepted as generally sound, if fiction and drama are equally included and are equally judged by the rule.

Again, if Brunetière is not absolutely right, he seems to be tracking a general tendency when he says, "As a matter of fact it is always at the exact moment of its national existence, when the will of a great people is exalted, so to speak within itself, that we see dramatic art reach also the highest point of its development, and produce its masterpieces."

There is probably some general truth in this, but it is to be noted that alongside the Elizabethan drama, was a great manifestation of general literary activity, which indeed did not take the form of fiction, but was



even farther removed from the drama. The great Elizabethan writers outside the drama may be claimed equally with the dramatists to be the evidence and product of a strong national will and spirit in that age. But Bacon, Spenser, Sidney, Hooker, North, Milton, Urquhart (if these two latter may be taken as late shoots from the same vigorous root) together with all the Elizabethan lyrists—these are generally far away from the drama.

Moreover there was a vigorous stiffening of the national will after the revolution of 1688 and under Queen Anne, which certainly did not generate the comedies of the period, but which was connected with other forms of literature outside the drama, and which almost certainly generated the first great English novelist—Defoe. It is quite true that, as Brunetière says, "It is extremely rare that a great development of the novel is contemporary with a great development of the theater." Curiously enough he goes on to disprove his own contention that the drama and fiction are the contrary of each other. For calling in a well known law of biology, he says that the reason that the



drama and the novel are rarely at a high level at the same time in the same country is "because in literature as in nature, the competition is always keenest between neighboring species and the soil is rarely rich enough for two rival varieties to prosper, develop, and multiply in peace."

This is a very apt and correct simile, but it affirms the very close relationship between fiction and the drama. In his next sentence he rather inconsistently reverts to his error by saying "But it is also because, being, as we have seen, the contrary of each other, drama and novel do not answer to the same conception of life." If the biological simile is true, and gives the reason that the drama and fiction rarely flourish together inasmuch they are allied varieties of the same stock, why bring in another reason which lamely affirms the contrary and confuses the argument?

The truth seems to be that an outburst of national drama may be one of the effects, or perhaps merely one of the symptoms, of a general rally of the national energies or will. And this general rally of the national energies may show itself in countless other ways

apart from the drama. But it is true, as Brunetière says, that an outburst of national drama is generally or always coincident with, or sequent to a national stir of energy or will. A nation with a strong will is likely to find itself involved in real and mimic drama, as a man with a strong will is likely to encounter dramatic adventures.

But if the drama and fiction are virtually the same, this flood of national energy may possibly take the broad loitering channels of fiction, though it is more likely to take the deeply cut precipitous gorges of drama. If the drama and fiction are fundamentally the same, they cannot answer to any fundamentally different conception of life, as Brunetière contends that they do. What difference there is between them will be a difference of degree, and not a difference of kind. Drama is drama whether it is found in a play or in a novel. Indeed, there is often a stronger pulse of drama in some novels and in some scenes of novels, than there is in many plays. Brunetière fails to establish any radical antithesis between fiction and the drama. There is no such antithesis.

And now it occurs to me that in my anx-

ity to "reconcile" Brunetière and Mr. Archer I have heedlessly embroiled them both with Aristotle. For it is certain that this other eminent critic very strongly, if indirectly, affirms the essential sameness of fiction and the drama, even the essential sameness of their primary law of construction. That is he affirms the general necessity of a rigid form, and the existence of a rigid law, in both arts.

Indirectly I think Aristotle lends confirmation to the law of the drama that I have formulated above. But even with the backing of Aristotle, I will yet in the interests of the drama, ask other eminent critics to set to work to refute me if they can, and to discover the existence of a veritable and universal law of drama which shall equally discomfit Brunetière, Archer and myself—and even Aristotle. There is a splendid reputation as a dramatic critic to be made in this direction.

It will be urged that many successful plays do not conform, or only very partially conform to the law I have laid down. That is quite true. It will be further urged, and with even greater wealth of instance, that



our enjoyment of certain plays is by no means proportionate to their conformation to the law. That again is quite true. And I will not be so churlish as to forbid anyone to enjoy himself in the theater, from a mere ignorance of the laws of the drama. It is far better to be amused by wrong methods than bored by right ones. But there are different levels of amusement. And if it is better to be amused by wrong methods on a low level than to be bored by right methods on a high level, how much better still it is to be amused by right methods on a high level than to be bored by wrong methods on a low level.

Finally, it must again be insisted that many things amuse us in the theater which are not drama, and have nothing to do with drama. We love to see pretty faces; we love legs and tomfoolery; we love to hear our own opinions bruited; we love to have our own prejudices flattered; we love to be tickled with sensual suggestions; we love to be daubed with the treacle of sentiment; we love to be educated in social science; we love to gloat in vicarious morality; we love to save our souls. And according as our tastes run in



one or in several of these directions we are gratified, and we carry our gratification to the account of the play.

During the last few years the lower forms of the theatrical entertainment have more and more provided attraction that is altogether apart from drama. They have tended to become mere orgies of slang, frivolity, sensuality, banality and imbecility. Their very titles stink with witless vulgarity. And their attraction is growing more and more potent with the great public.

yes ( May not their growing attraction be partly due to the fact that the higher forms of theatrical entertainment have also, in quite another way, strayed far away from the drama, and have become largely a hubbub of confused "ideas," and a discordant chorus of social reforms? Will not many of the pieces, which have recently been hailed as masterpieces because they disdained to be plays—will they not fail to retain a permanent hold of the stage because they have neglected to conform to any intelligible law? Is it not apparent that they have already failed with the great body of present day playgoers—the only tribunal to which any

playwright can or ought to appeal in the first instance? No dramatist has ever written for posterity.

At such a juncture it may not be inopportune to recall the fact that every art has its laws, and that the laws of the drama are more rigid than those of any other art. Laws may indeed be defied, and successfully defied, for a time. But as Brunetière has pointed out, they remain. And they avenge themselves in the end.

There are two very good old-fashioned laws which are plainly laid down in the seventh and eighth commandments. We see them successfully defied every day. And it is to be sorrowfully noted that the people who successfully defy them are often the most amiable and charming people that we meet. But there is always some danger of the divorce court for those who defy the former of them, and some danger of the jail for those who defy the latter. Not very much danger perhaps, but every now and then we get a rude admonition that the laws remain. Similarly there are many enjoyable plays that successfully defy the laws of

drama—for a time. But they get found  
out in the end.

The law remains.

HENRY ARTHUR JONES.

(April, 1914.)

## **THE LAW OF THE DRAMA**





## THE LAW OF THE DRAMA

If some "First-Nighter" or some "Old Playgoer" who was not born when our acquaintance began, should be surprised, my dear Noël, to see me writing this preface for your 'Annales du Théâtre et de la Musique,' certainly no one is better qualified than you to answer him, and tell him how great has been my love for the theater. That was about 1867—more than twenty-five years ago; and we were not rich. But somehow or other we had managed to make the acquaintance of several leaders of the *claque*, and for twenty-five cents—sometimes for ten, on repertory nights—we bought the right to sit in the pit of the Comédie-Française—and to applaud as little as we chose. The Gymnase and the Vaudeville where there was no pit, cost us more. Were those, as the saying is, the "good old days"? I will not answer for you, but for my part, I am not one of those who regret their youth; and if ever I do, I shall have greatly changed. And yet we had our happy moments, parti-

cularly after the theater, along the deserted quays, or the next day, under the trees in the Luxembourg, when we would discuss which was the better in the 'Mariage de Figaro,' Got with his careful, intelligent, quiet rendering, or the broader, less studied, more spontaneous rendering of Coquelin, who since . . . but at that time he was the spoiled child of the House of Molière. Were you not translating Goethe's plays then? And for a change, you would go to see 'King Lear' at the Odéon. . . . These memories are becoming a little confused to my mind. But if I remember rightly, we preferred above all the plays of Musset: the 'Caprices de Marianne,' the 'Chandelier,' 'On ne badine pas avec l'amour,' 'Il ne faut jurer de rien' . . . and, to be frank, I care less much less about him today, but I am not ashamed of having liked him. And how many performances, by how many actors, have we seen of 'Horace' and 'Britannicus,' 'Esther' and 'Athalie,' 'Tartuffe' and the 'Misanthrope,' the 'Barbier de Seville,' in which no one has equalled Bressant, and the 'Mariage de Figaro,' in which no one has replaced Leroux. I like to think that we

thus contributed our little share to bring the classics back to their place of honor. For they are played more often now than then. Didn't you and I wait until we were quite grown-up to see 'Bajazet,' for example, or 'Bérénice'? We were in despair. . . .

If now I have almost ceased to attend the theater, if I only follow it from afar, it is my own fault, and mine alone. What would you have? The fifteen lectures which I delivered at the Odéon, nearly three years ago, on the 'Évolution du Théâtre Français' left me sated, saturated, wearied with the subject,—gorged, if I may say so. But they were not without their usefulness for me; and, between ourselves, if some of my auditors were kind enough to like them, it was I who profited the most. Instead of applying myself, confining myself, as I had done before, and as we all do, to the examination of 'Polyeucte' or of 'Andromaque' and following my personal taste or the demand of the moment, I had to try to grasp the essence and the connection of the works in the history of our stage, and to deduce from them, if I could, the theory, or, to speak more modestly, a theory of dramatic action. And



so, when you invited me this year to write the Preface for your interesting 'Annales' I accepted at once. The theory, uncertain and still vague in my lectures, had taken definite form. It had become broader, it seems to me, by becoming more simple. A child could understand it. And do not tell me that you are tempted to distrust it, precisely because of this simplicity! On the contrary, my dear friend, it is not art, science, nor life that are complex, it is the ideas that we form for ourselves in regard to them. Whoever grasps a principle, grasps all its applications. But the very diversity, multiplicity, perversity, and apparent contradiction of these applications, prevent him from seeing the principle. Will any argument, however ingenious, alter the fact that all poetry is either lyric, epic, or dramatic? Certainly not. And if the 'Cid,' if 'Phèdre,' if 'Tartuffe,' if the 'Légataire Universel,' if the 'Barbier de Seville,' if the 'Camaraderie,' if the 'Demi-monde,' if 'Célimare le Bien-Aimé' are dramatic, does it not follow that all these works, so different, must nevertheless have not merely a few points of contact or vague resemblance, but an essential characteristic in common? What is this

characteristic? That is what I shall try to explain.

Observe, if you please, that I ask only one—no more—and that I leave the dramatist complete freedom in development. That is where I depart from the old school of criticism, that believed in the mysterious power of “Rules” in their inspiring virtues; and consequently we see the old-school critics struggling and striving, exercising all their ingenuity to invent additional Rules; read, for example, the ‘Cours de Littérature Analytique’ by Népomucène Lemercier. But the truth is that there are no Rules in that sense; there never will be. There are only conventions, which are necessarily variable, since their only object is to fulfil the essential aim of the dramatic work, and the means of accomplishing this vary with the piece, the time, and the man. Must we, like Corneille, regularly subordinate character to situation; invent, construct, the situations first, and then, if I may so express it, put the characters inside? We may do so, certainly, since he did it, in the ‘Cid’ and in ‘Horace,’ in ‘Polyeucte’ and in ‘Rodogune.’ Or shall we, like Racine, subordinate situation to character,

find the characters first, study them, master them, and then seek the situations which will best bring out their different aspects? We may do so, and that is what he did, as you know, in 'Andromaque,' in 'Britannicus,' in 'Bajazet,' in 'Phèdre.' There is an example, then, of a Rule which may be violated, and Racine's dramaturgy is none the less dramatic for being the opposite of Corneille's dramaturgy. Take another Rule. Shall we oblige the dramatic author to observe the Three Unities? I reply that he will not be hampered by them, if he can choose, like Racine, subjects which properly or necessarily adjust themselves of their own accord, so to speak, to the rule: 'Bérénice,' 'Iphigénie,' 'Esther' . . . But if he chooses, like Shakspeare, subjects which are checked by it in their free development, or diverted merely, we will relieve him of the Rule: and 'Othello,' 'Macbeth,' 'Hamlet,' will still be drama. This is another example of a Rule which can be turned in various ways. Or again, shall we mingle tragic and comic, tears and laughter, terror and joy, the sublime and the grotesque, Ariel and Caliban, Bottom and Titania, Triboulet and François



I, Don Guritan and Ruy Blas? Shakspeare and Hugo have done it, but Euripides and Sophocles seems to have carefully avoided it; and who will deny that they were both right? We do not feel the need of a comic element to enliven or vary the severe beauty of 'Œdipus at Colonus,' but we should certainly be sorry to have King Lear deprived of his Fool. It is unnecessary to continue. Evidently, all these alleged Rules affect or express only the most superficial characteristics of the drama. Not only are they not mysterious, they are not in the least profound. Whether we observe them or not, drama is drama with them or without them. They are only devices which may at any time give place to others. It all depends on the subject, the author, and the public. This is the point to add that there is something which does not depend on them.

To convince ourselves of that fact, let us examine more carefully two or three works whose dramatic value is universally recognized, and let us take them from species as different as the 'Cid,' the 'Ecole des femmes,' and 'Célimare le Bien Aimé.' Chimène *wants* to avenge her father; and the question is

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justified



how she will succeed. Arnolphe *wants* to marry Agnès, whose stupidity will guarantee her fidelity; and the question is whether he will succeed. Célimare *wants* to get rid of the widowers of his former mistresses; and the question is what means he will employ. But Célimare is hampered in the execution is his *will* by his fear of the vengeance of his friends. Arnolphe is disturbed in the execution of his *will* by the young madcap Horace, who arouses love, and with love a *will*, in Agnès' heart. Chimène is betrayed in the execution of her *will* by the love which she feels for Rodrigue. On the other hand, Chimène's *will* is checked and broken by the insurmountable obstacle which she encounters in a *will* superior to her own. Arnolphe, who is far from being a fool, sees all the plans of his *will* tricked by the conspiracy of youth and love. And Célimare, by the power of his *will*, triumphs over the widowers of his mistresses. Nothing would be easier than to multiply examples. Take the 'Tour de Nesles,' the 'Demi-monde,' and the 'Chapeau de Paille d'Italie.' Fadinard *wants* to obtain a Leghorn hat to replace that of Mme. Beauperthuis; and the whole farce

consists in the remarkable character of the means which he employs. Suzanne d'Ange *wants* to marry M. de Nanjac; and the whole drama consists only in the means which she formulates. Buridan *wants* to exploit the monstrous secret which exists between him and Marguerite de Bourgogne; and the whole melodrama consists only of the succession of the means which he invents. Buridan's will is opposed in its work by Marguerite's pride. Suzanne's will is countered by that of Olivier de Jalin. And Fadinard's will becomes entangled in the means which he seeks to satisfy it. But chance, more powerful than Fadinard's *will*, brings success at the moment when he least expects it. Olivier's will wins out over Suzanne's. And by the exercise of their *will*, Marguerite and Buridan fall into the trap set by their own *will*. Is it not easy now to draw the conclusion? In drama or farce, what we ask of the theater, is the spectacle of a will striving towards a goal, and conscious of the means which it employs. \*

This essential characteristic of dramatic composition distinguishes it, in the first place, from lyric composition, which I shall

not discuss, in order not to complicate the question unnecessarily, and from the composition of the novel, with which, especially in our day, it has so often been confused. "Who is not for us is against us,"—you know the phrase. The drama and the novel are not the same thing; or rather, each is exactly the opposite of the other. Read 'Gil Blas' again, or go again to see the 'Mariage de Figaro.' The setting and the character are the same. Beaumarchais made a trip to Spain, but Lesage's novel was none the less his principal model. I have shown elsewhere that we find in the monolog of Figaro whole sentences from 'Gil Blas.' Only, whereas nothing happens to Gil Blas that he has actually *willed*, it is on the contrary Figaro's *will* that conducts the plot of his marriage. Let us pursue this point of comparison.

Gil Blas, like everybody else, wants to live, and if possible to live agreeably. That is not what we call having a will. But Figaro wants a certain definite thing, which is to prevent Count Almaviva from exercising on Suzanne the seigneurial privilege. He finally succeeds,—and I grant, since the statement



has been made, that it is not exactly thru the means which he had chosen, most of which turn against him; but nevertheless he has constantly willed what he willed. He had not ceased to devise means of attaining it, and when these means have failed, he has not ceased to invent new ones. That is what may be called *will*, to set up a goal, and to direct everything toward it, to strive to bring everything into line with it. Gil Blas really has no goal. Highway robber, doctor's assistant, servant to a canon, to an actress, or to a nobleman, all the positions which he occupies one after another, come to him from fortune or chance. He has no plan, because he has no particular or definite aim. He is subject to circumstances; he does not try to dominate them. He does not *act*; he is *acted upon*. Is not the difference evident? The proper aim of the novel, as of the epic—of which it is only a secondary and derived form, what the naturalists call a sub-species or a variety—the aim of the 'Odyssey,' as of 'Gil Blas,' of the 'Knights of the Round Table,' as of 'Madame Bovary,' is to give us a picture of the influence which is exercised upon us by all that is

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outside of ourselves. The novel is therefore the contrary of the drama; and if I have successfully set forth this opposition, do you not see the consequences which result from it?

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✓

It is thus that one can distinguish action from motion or agitation; and that is certainly worth while. Is it action to move about? Certainly not, and there is no true action except that of a will conscious of itself, conscious, as I was saying, of the means which it employs for its fulfillment, one which adapts them to its goal, and all other forms of action are only imitations, counterfeits, or parodies. The material or the subject of a novel or of a play may therefore be the same at bottom; but they become drama or novel only by the manner in which they are treated; and the manner is not merely different, it is opposite. One will never be able, therefore, to transfer to the stage any novels except those which are already dramatic; and note well that they are dramatic only to the extent to which their heroes are truly the architects of their destiny. It follows that one could make a novel of the 'Mariage de Figaro,' but one will never

make a drama or a comedy of 'Gil Blas.' One might make a novel of Corneille's 'Rodogune,' one will never make a drama of Rousseau's 'Héloïse.' The general law of the theater, thus defined, gives us, then, in the first place, a sure means of perceiving what in any subject there is of the novel or the drama. The fact is that people do not know this well enough; and the Naturalist school in France has committed no worse error than confusing the conditions of the two species.

The same law provides, further, the possibility of defining with precision the dramatic species—about as one does the biological species; and for that it is only necessary to consider the particular obstacle against which the will struggles. If these obstacles are recognized to be insurmountable, or reputed to be so, as were, for example, in the eyes of the ancient Greeks, the decrees of Fate; or, in the eyes, of the Christians, the decrees of Providence; as are, for us, the laws of nature, or the passions aroused to frenzy and becoming thus the internal fatality of Phèdre and of Roxane, of Hamlet or of Othello;—it is tragedy. The

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✓ incidents are generally terrifying, and the conclusion sanguinary, because in the struggle which man undertakes to make against fate, he is vanquished in advance, and must perish. Suppose now that he has a chance of victory, just one, that he still has in himself the power to conquer his passion; or suppose that, the obstacles which he is striving to overcome being the work of his fellow men, as prejudice, for example, or social conventions, a man is for that very reason capable of surmounting them,—that is the drama properly speaking, romantic drama or social drama, 'Hernani' or 'Antony,' the 'Fils Naturel' or 'Madame Caverlet.' Change once more the nature of the obstacle, equalize, at least in appearance, the conditions of the struggle, bring together two opposing wills, Arnolphe and Agnès, Figaro and Almaviva, Suzanne d'Ange and Olivier de Jalin—that is comedy. ✓ 'Don Sanche d'Aragon,' heroic comedy,—you know this title of one of Corneille's plays. 'Bérénice,' for the same reason, is hardly a tragedy. But instead of locating 4 the obstacle in an opposing will, conscious and mistress of its acts, in a social convention or in the fatality of destiny, let us locate



it in the irony of fortune, or in the ridiculous aspect of prejudice, or again in the disproportion between the means and the end,—that is farce, that is the 'Légataire Universel,' the 'Chapeau de Paille d'Italie.'

I do not say after that, that the types are always pure. In the history of literature or of art, as in nature, a type is almost never anything but an ideal, and consequently a limit. Where is the man among us, where is the woman, who embodies the perfection of the sex and of the species? There is moreover a natural relationship, we might say a consanguinity between adjoining species. Is a mulatto or a quadroon white or black? They are related to both. Likewise there may be an alliance or mixture of farce and comedy, of drama and tragedy. 'Célimare' is almost a comedy; the 'Cid' is almost a melodrama. It is nevertheless useful to have carefully defined the species; and if the law should only teach authors not to treat a subject of comedy by the devices of farce, that would be something. The general law of the theater is defined by the action of a will conscious of itself; and the dramatic



*farces*  
species are distinguished by the nature of the obstacles encountered by this will.

And the quality of will measures and determines, in its turn, the dramatic value of each work in its species. Intelligence rules in the domain of speculation, but the will governs in the field of action, and consequently in history. It is the will which gives power; and power is hardly ever lost except by a failure or relaxation of the will. But that is also the reason why men think there is nothing grander than the development of the will, whatever the object, and that is the reason for the superiority of tragedy over the other dramatic forms. One may prefer for one's own taste a farce to a tragedy; one ought even to prefer a good farce to a mediocre tragedy, that goes without saying; and we do it every day. One cannot deny that tragedy is superior to farce: 'Athalie' to the 'Légataire Universel,' and 'Ruy Blas' to the 'Trois Epiciers.' Another reason sometimes given is that it implies indifference to death, but that is the same reason, if the supreme effort of the will is to conquer the horror of death. But shall we say that comedy is superior to farce, and why? We will

say that, and for the same reason, because the obstacles against which Crispin contends in the 'Légataire Universel' do not exist; strictly speaking; they are only an invention of Regnard; and so the will is exerting itself to no effect. The goal is only a lure, so the action is only a game. And we will say in conclusion that one drama is superior to another drama according as the quantity of will exerted is greater or less, as the share of chance is less, and that of necessity greater. Who doubts that 'Bajazet' is very much superior to 'Zaïre'? If you seek the true reason, you will find it here. 'Zaïre' would not finish if Voltaire did not intervene at every moment in his work; but given the characters of Bajazet and Roxane, they develop as if of themselves; and does it not really seem as if Racine confined himself to observing their action?

I will not continue. But I cannot refrain from noting the remarkable confirmation that this law finds in the general history of the theater. As a matter of fact, it is always at the exact moment of its national existence when the will of a great people is exalted, so to speak, within itself, that we see

its dramatic art reach also the highest point of its development, and produce its masterpieces. Greek tragedy is contemporary with the Persian wars. Æschylus fought the Medæ; and while the fleets were engaged in the waters of Salamis, on that very day, the legend has it, Euripides was born. Legend is perhaps not more true, but it is often more profound than history. Consider the Spanish theater: Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Calderón, belong to the time when Spain was extending over all of Europe, as well as over the New World, the domination of her will, or rather, as great causes do not always produce their literary effects at once, they are of the time immediately following. And France in the seventeenth century? The greatest struggle that our fathers made to maintain, within as without, the unity of the French nation, or to bring it to pass, was at the end of the sixteenth century, and was under Henry IV, under Richelieu, under Mazarin. The development of the theater followed immediately. I see, indeed, that great strengthenings of the national will have not always been followed by a dramatic renaissance, in England in the eighteenth century,



for example, or in Germany today; but what I do not see, is a dramatic renaissance whose dawn has not been announced, as it were, by some progress, or some arousing of the will. Think of the theater of Lessing, of Schiller, of Goethe and remember what Frederick the Great had done, a few years before, without knowing it perhaps, to give to the Germany of the eighteenth century a consciousness of herself and of her national genius. The converse is no less striking. If it is extremely rare that a great development of the novel is contemporary even with a great development of the theater—if in France in particular, when the Molières, the Corneilles, the Racines have appeared, we have seen the Artamènes, the Faramons, the Astrées sink gently into oblivion, or again if Gil Blas, Manon Lescaut, Marianne are contemporary, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, with an exhaustion only too certain of the dramatic vein,—it is because in literature as in nature, the competition is always keenest between the neighboring species; and the soil is rarely rich enough for two rival varieties to prosper, develope and multiply in peace. But it is also because, being as we



have seen, the contrary each of the other, drama and novel do not answer to the same conception of life. Gil Blas and Figaro, I repeat, belong to the same family; they cannot belong to the same time; and between them, if you take the trouble to examine carefully, there is all the interval that separates the relaxation of the will in the time of the Regency, from the vigorous recovery that it makes on the eve of the Revolution. What can be more singular? But if the theater has for its object to present the development of the will, what can be more natural? The Orientals have no drama, but they have novels. That is because they are fatalists, or determinists if you prefer, which amounts to the same thing, for today at least; and when the Greeks had a drama, they no longer had novels, I mean epics; they no longer had an 'Odyssey.'

You see the reason, don't you? Are we free agents? Or are we not? Are we the masters of events? Or are we only their dupes, their playthings, their victims? I don't know; at this moment I don't care to know, and you may believe that I am not going to dabble in metaphysics here. But in

any case it appears that our belief in our freedom is of no small assistance in the struggle that we undertake against the obstacles which prevent us from attaining our object. And I grant that in order to succeed in dominating nature, or even in reforming society, it is not necessary to believe one's self capable of it. There is always an acquired momentum of the human race that aids the insufficiency of individual effort. But that is not without value either; for one does not attempt the impossible. The bond between the belief in free will and the exertion of the will explains therefore pretty well the favor or the moral support given, at certain epochs, to an art whose essential object is the representation of the power of the will. A question of fitness, or, as we say, of adaptation to environment. The belief in determinism is more favorable to the progress of the novel, but the belief in free will is more favorable to the progress of dramatic art. Men of action, Richelieu, Condé, Frederick, Napoleon, have always been fond of the theater.

And why may we not see here, in a sort of weakening of the will among us, one at least

of the reasons for what we have generally called, for the last ten years, the dramatic crisis? Drama does not "go" they tell us. Comedy is languishing. Farce is dying out. As a matter of fact, I am sure that there is some exaggeration in the wail. Your 'Annales' would suffice to prove it, if need be. But that the contemporary drama is inferior as a whole to the drama of only twenty or twenty-five years ago, it seems to me difficult not to admit. On the other hand, the philosophers, or even mere observers, complain that the power of will is weakening, relaxing, disintegrating. People no longer know how to exert their will, they say, and I am afraid that they have some right to say it. We are broken-winded, as the poet says. We are abandoning ourselves. We are letting ourselves drift with the current. Are you not tempted to see here something more than a mere coincidence? For my part, I see here the explanation of the crisis, and at the same time another proof of the truth of the Law of the theater.

Permit me to stop here. . . .

As I was saying, my dear Noël,—no, I have not yet said it—the subject is one of



those which would fill a book, and I have not time to write the book, and if I did write it, you would not be able to use it. In the meantime, since you have believed that the idea of the book might deserve discussion, I have been glad to take the opportunity which you offered me to express it. I have been able only to indicate rapidly a few of its applications but I noted others in my lectures at the Odéon; and now I see an infinite number of them. If your readers should see still more, that is about all I could desire. I say about all, for there is one thing more I should like, and that is, that they should grasp clearly the difference between the idea of Law and the idea of Rule: the Rule being always limited by its very expression, incapable of exceeding it without destroying itself, always narrow, consequently unbending, rigid, or so to speak, tyrannical; and the Law, on the contrary, inevitable by definition and so fundamentally immutable, but broad, supple, flexible in its application, very simple and very general at the same time, very rich in applications, and, without ceasing to be the Law, always ready to be enriched by whatever reflection, experi-

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ence, or history contribute in confirmations to explain it, or in contradictions to be absorbed in it.

April 1, 1894.

*(Translated by Philip M. Hayden.)*

## **N O T E S**



## NOTES

Brunetière's paper was published as the preface to the volume dealing with the French theater for the year 1893 in the series entitled 'Annales du Théâtre et de la Musique' edited by Edouard Noël and Edmond Stoullig. As its writer notes it clarifies a theory of the drama which had been put forward less sharply in a series of lectures on the 'Époques du Théâtre Français' delivered at the Odéon theater in Paris in the winter of 1891-2 and published shortly thereafter. The theory as finally stated by Brunetière in his own, altho it seems to have had its origin in the doctrine of the "tragic conflict" declared by Hegel and taken over by Schlegel and Coleridge. The idea that tragedy must present a struggle is perhaps as ancient as Aristotle. In Professor A. C. Bradley's 'Oxford Lectures on Poetry' (1909) there is an admirable analysis of Hegel's theory of tragedy. But Brunetière goes far beyond Hegel and Aristotle. He subordinates the idea of struggle to the idea of volition. And in so doing he broadens the doctrine to include not tragedy only but all the manifold forms of the drama.

It is somewhat remarkable that Brune-



tière's new declaration of the law of the drama excited little or no discussion either in France or elsewhere when it was first made. For example, it was not cited by M. Emile Faguet, in his suggestive 'Drame Ancien, Drame Moderne,' published in 1898, altho it would have been useful to his argument had he known it. Attention was first directed to it in the opening chapter on the 'Art of the Dramatist' in the 'Development of the Drama' by Professor Brander Matthews, published in 1903. The same writer in his 'Study of the Drama,' issued in 1910, devoted a chapter to the 'Law of the Drama' in which Brunetière's theory was accepted with a mild protest against the arbitrary rigor of Brunetière's declaration and with the suggestion that it might have been better if the strenuous French critic had laid down his principle more as a deduction from a careful consideration of the masterpieces of the drama, ancient and modern, the result of which would show that "the attention of an audience in a theater can be aroused and retained only by an exhibition of the human will." Brunetière's law is accepted also in Mr. Clayton Hamilton's 'Theory of the Theater,' published in 1910, altho it more or less questioned in this writer's later 'Studies in Stagecraft,' published in 1914.

But it is disputed in Mr. William Archer's

'Playmaking,' published in 1912, this critic pointing out the difficulty of finding a genuine conflict in many of the best known plays and suggesting that "the essence of the drama is crisis." Perhaps there is not quite so distinct a difference between "conflict" and "crisis" as is here suggested. But no fault can be found with a later assertion of the author of 'Playmaking': "The only really valid definition is: Any representation of imaginary personages which is capable of interesting an average audience assembled in a theater. . . . Any further attempt to limit the context of the term 'dramatic' is simply the expression of an opinion that such-and-such forms of representation will not be found to interest an audience; and this opinion may always be rebutted by experiment."

The so-called Rules of the drama, which Brunetière contemptuously brushed aside as lacking in the validity of ascertained Law, are those which had been elaborated by the Italian theorists of the Renaissance to be reinforced by the professed critics of every modern language,—altho the practical playwrights of England and Spain steadily refused to be shackled by them. Even after Lessing had demolished the authority of these Rules in Germany they still fettered the dramatists of France. They are found

in all their final rigidity in the 'Cours Analytique de Littérature', by Nepomucène Lemer cier, delivered as lectures in 1810-11 and published in 1817 in three volumes, wherein the lecturer catalogs the twenty-five Rules to which the writer of tragedy must conform at his peril and the twenty-two Rules with which the writer of comedy must comply.

Only ten years after the publication of this Draconian code, Victor Hugo penned his flamboyant declaration of independence in the preface to his unactable dramatic poem, 'Cromwell' published in 1827, in which he attacked the citadel of Classicism. "Nevertheless they repeat, and for a little while, no doubt, they will go on repeating: "Follow the Rules! Imitate the models! It was the Rules which guided the models! —But wait a moment. In this case there must be two sorts of models, those which were made according to the Rules, and earlier those according to which the Rules were made."

B. M.





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